

TESTIMONY OF
WILLIAM T. HOGARTH, Ph.D.
ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR FOR FISHERIES
NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION
U.S. DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE

REGARDING H. CON. RES. 427

BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON RESOURCES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON FISHERIES CONSERVATION, WILDLIFE AND OCEANS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

SEPTEMBER 26, 2002

Mr. Chairman and members of the Subcommittee, thank you for inviting me to testify before the Subcommittee regarding House Concurrent Resolution 427. I am Dr. William T. Hogarth, Assistant Administrator for Fisheries for the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). In this testimony, I will be commenting on House Concurrent Resolution 427, a resolution concerned with the conservation and management of Atlantic highly migratory species.

I would like to begin by making a few general remarks. Although I have been familiar with the international aspects of highly migratory species management for a number of years, the 2002 meeting of the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas (ICCAT) will mark my first as a U.S. Commissioner. I am looking forward to leading the U.S. delegation at the meeting this October. The United States is committed to the effective functioning of ICCAT. Practically speaking, it is the only viable means we have to conserve and manage Atlantic highly migratory species and to ensure future fishing opportunities for all U.S. fishermen.

It has become increasingly clear over the years that the issues facing ICCAT are not only increasing in number, but they are also increasing in complexity. The 2002 ICCAT meeting may prove to be the busiest and most complicated yet. Marlin conservation and compliance are two of the complex issues we will be addressing at ICCAT this fall. The United States has faced these important issues repeatedly at ICCAT over the years, and we have made some notable progress.

With respect to marlin, the United States has successfully pursued increasingly stringent conservation and management measures at ICCAT. This has been no mean feat considering that the majority of marlin harvested are taken as non-target species in other, more lucrative, tuna and swordfish fisheries that are spread among a large number of international fleets. The first binding measure ICCAT adopted required a 25 percent reduction in marlin landings from 1996 levels by 1999. These reductions were to be maintained through 2000. Although not all ICCAT members were able to meet the landings reduction targets for white marlin, by 1999 overall landings of this species had declined 40 percent below the 25 percent target reduction level. More recently, ICCAT adopted a rebuilding plan for marlins. The first phase of the

plan requires additional landings reductions. White marlin landings are to be reduced 67 percent from the 1999 level, and blue marlin by 50 percent. It is too soon to tell whether or not these landings reductions have been achieved since they only went into effect last year. We have, however, received very encouraging information that Japan, Brazil, the European Community, and others with significant longline fleets have taken steps to implement the required reductions. Brazil has even gone so far as to institute a ban on the trade of marlins.

Regarding compliance, the United States has been pursuing state-of-the-art measures to ensure ICCAT members abide by their commitments. Among other things, these compliance rules require that quota overharvests are paid back and that quota penalties, including trade measures, are assessed for consecutive quota violations in certain cases. Further, ICCAT has developed approaches designed to encourage non-member cooperation with ICCAT conservation and management measures. These measures can and have resulted in the imposition of trade measures against both ICCAT member and non-member countries and they, together with other innovative approaches taken by ICCAT, have been effective in helping to address illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing for Atlantic highly migratory species. The United States fully supports the use of multilateral trade measures to further conservation goals. Since we are a major importer of certain ICCAT species - in particular, swordfish - we are a key player in their implementation.

Even with the progress ICCAT has made on these and other issues, challenges remain. We are currently considering new steps that we can take at ICCAT this year to address not only marlin conservation and compliance issues but a host of other important matters such as bluefin tuna and swordfish management, allocation issues, and fishery monitoring issues. In that regard, we welcome the additional attention Congress is giving to ICCAT issues as evidenced by Congressional Resolution 427. The good intentions and spirit behind the resolution are clear and, in that respect, we are supportive of it. We do believe, however, that the language is too narrowly focused in some instances, particularly given the large number of important issues to be faced at ICCAT this year. Operative paragraph 1 is one such example. It would also be useful to recognize in the resolution that progress on compliance matters, including addressing illegal, unregulated, and unreported fishing, has been made and should continue to be a priority. We would be glad to work with you and your staff to develop appropriate language. With changes along the lines I have described, I believe that the resolution would be very useful in helping the United States advance its goals for ICCAT.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my testimony. Once again, thank you for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to answering any questions you or members of the Subcommittee may have.